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Library
al Gallery of Art

ITALIAN DRAWINGS FOR JEWELRY 1700-1875

An Introduction to an Exhibition

at the

Cooper Union Museum for the Arts of Decoration

September 9 through October 19, 1940

ITALIAN DRAWINGS FOR JEWELRY

1700-1875

INTRODUCTION

This pamphlet has been prepared to facilitate the appreciation of the jewelry drawings in the exhibition. It does not presume to provide a chapter in the unwritten history of Italian jewelry. The book, *La Bijouterie au XIX^e^ Siècle*, by Henri Vever, Paris, 1906-08, is very helpful for an understanding of the period it covers.

The drawings, approximately six hundred, represent three acquisitions. Series 1901-39-, purchased by Miss Eleanor G. Hewitt with funds contributed by ten of the early friends of the Museum, was a selection from the collection of Cavaliere Giovanni Piancastelli (1845-1926), Curator of the Borghese Gallery in Rome. This was the source also of series 1938-88-, which Cavaliere Piancastelli had sold in 1904 to Mrs. Edward D. Brandegee, of Boston, who generously made it possible for the Museum to acquire the greater part of her purchase in 1938. Cavaliere Piancastelli's reunited collection contains more than eleven thousand drawings related to the arts of decoration, and the jewelry designs give clear evidence of his attempt to acquire as many as possible of drawings which had accumulated within individual workshops.

A third series, 1940-86-, has just been acquired through the Mrs. John I. Kane Bequest Fund. It contains several groups of jewelry drawings covering roughly the period 1800 to 1880. The largest group by far is composed of drawings closely related to one another, attributable to one goldsmith's workshop operating between 1800 and 1860 and apparently conducted by an older man, "A.M.", and a younger, "N.M.", who worked in close collaboration. Other groups are connected with the Fiorentine jewelry firm Rodolfo Tanagli Pagani, with Francesco Tanagli, a designer "Z.C.", and G. Campani.

THE NATURE OF THE WORKSHOP COLLECTIONS

The collections of the various workshops consist of drawings which originated in one of the following ways:

(1). During his apprenticeship, the jeweler frequently needed to exercise his creative and decorative faculties. As the materials of his craft were most expensive, drawings formed an indispensable substitute for the actual execution.

(2). The matured master brought his ideas to life on paper. Sometimes he made drawings "for study," as indicated by the notations which Girolamo Venturi, a Sienese goldsmith, wrote upon the back of some of his drawings about 1740.

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(3). There is always the possibility that when the means were forthcoming the designs produced as above may have been intended for printed reproduction as models. These reproductions served not only to advertise the designer but to give him an influential share in the general development of the craft. Very elaborate sets, such as those that occur among the drawings of Giovanni Sebastiano Meyandi and of the jeweler referred to below as "the Neapolitan," give the impression that they were prepared with this end in view. Such drawings tend toward a richer and more complicated design than can be executed with facility in actual objects.

(4). In general, the means of advertising were few and the clientele restricted. Therefore the jeweler could not afford to carry out all of his ideas. But when a customer came, he had to be able to demonstrate his ability, supported by a pictorial record of work that he had done. In this respect, the drawings were put to much the same use as photographs would be today.

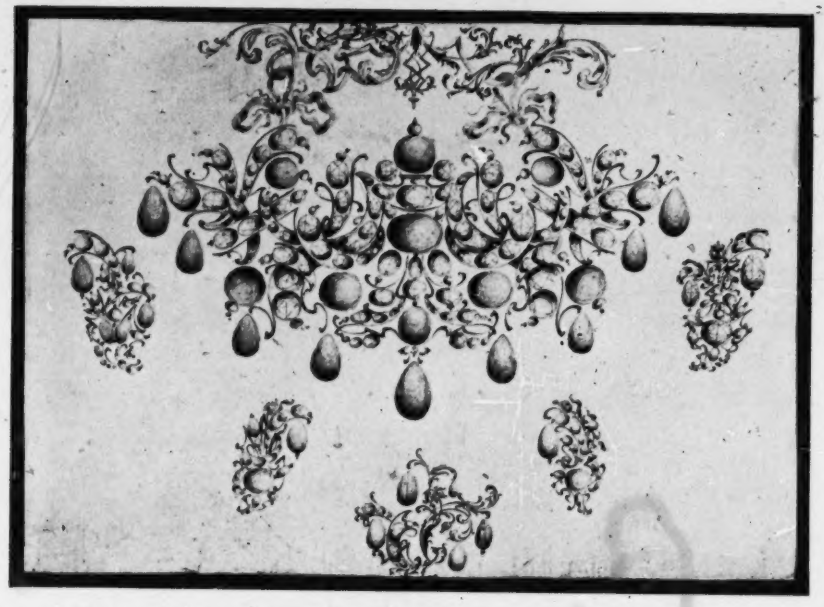
(5). A customer likes to choose. In general, therefore, the jeweler had to give him the choice of several proposals. Although he could draw upon his stock of old drawings, he often would be obliged to present new ones to indicate that he was in step with changing fashions.

Drawings prepared for a customer were not always made by the head of a workshop. Copies of existing drawings could easily be executed by another hand. Furthermore, the master often may have prepared a sketch from which another man could execute an elaborate drawing in the manner characteristic of the workshop.

It should not be forgotten that the head of a workshop regarded all drawings made by his journeymen as his own. Surely the master grown old but not yet retired made every use he could of his son or some other relative who would follow him in proprietorship, retaining for himself the general direction of the business and probably handling the accounting. It is interesting to observe in the collection from "the Neapolitan's" shop that another person supplies the drawings although the price and other comments continue to be written in the same hand. Where this ceases to appear it may be assumed that the workshop acquired a new head.

(6). Some are working drawings, made for the purpose of enabling a journeyman to make the actual objects. These show details of construction.

(7). When the master himself wanted inspiration during the eighteenth century, he could refer to engraved models, which were provided in the course of the nineteenth century by professional literature. Immediately after 1850 began the influence of the great expositions. But it was natural that the master should seek to perpetuate the memory of his father or other predecessor in the workshop, or of his teachers. Similarly, each master craftsman enjoyed keeping representations of the work of other masters, which he sometimes received as a gift. He liked to have a graphic record of work that had impressed him. And finally, it was only human of him to keep some record of his own progress.



GIROLAMO VENTURI. COLORED PROJECTS FOR BROOCHES. LATIN CAPTION ON THE REVERSE READS, "JEROME VENTURI, GOLDSMITH IN SIENA, MADE IT FOR STUDY ON THE TWELFTH DAY OF SEPTEMBER IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD 1739." 1938-88-7410

There is no reason to assume that any of the exhibited drawings represent the stage of production where the head of the enterprise was primarily concerned with the general administration of the business, leaving the designing and execution to an employee.

GRAPHIC ASPECTS

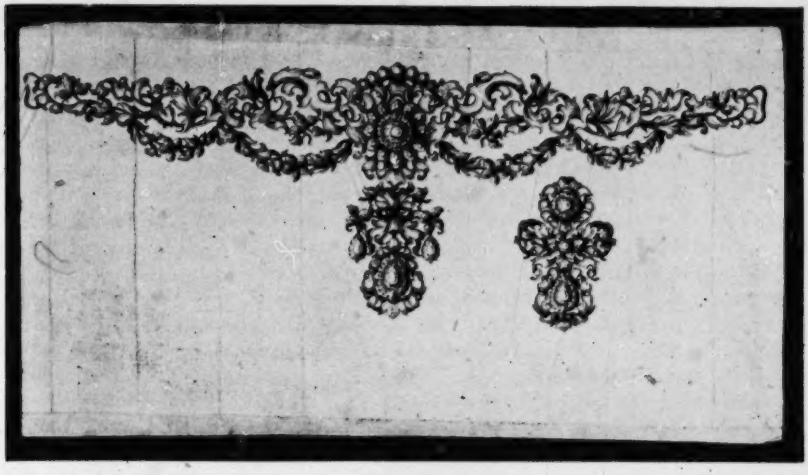
Evidently the collection of drawings which a workshop owned at any given moment contained differing elements: the drawings certainly were different in their graphic character, and very probably different in their authorship. One category is that of sketches, which are drawings that have been made more or less rapidly and lightly to indicate the general shape and decoration of an object in its entirety or in its essential parts. Other drawings may be classified as projects. These have been refined to a point where they would permit a customer to get a sufficient idea of the finished object and by the same token enable a journeyman to execute the piece of jewelry or, where necessary, prepare a working drawing from which the finished object could

be made. This double purpose allows for a great variety in the appearance of projects.

Often a project will lend itself to the representation of merely one half or one side of the object, as in the case of a symmetrical design. At times there are alternative suggestions within a single drawing to facilitate the choice. Projects are often limited to black and white even when fashion required the use of gems of more than one color. In general the customer had to choose the stones to be employed in the design he selected, as this choice greatly influenced the price. Therefore the color scheme probably was settled for the most part by verbal discussion. It may be assumed that the drawings which are elaborate in color were made for study or for impressing the designers' high craftsmanship upon employers, agents, and publishers rather than prospective buyers of the jewelry depicted.

CLASSIFICATIONS AND ATTRIBUTIONS

The great diversity of appearance makes it difficult to reassemble the collections of the various workshops after they have been dispersed. It is not always possible to recognize a personal style in drawings which were made over a period of decades with the intention of being as objective as possible with respect to their graphic appearance and emphasizing only the material aspect of the subjects depicted. Only much research and a measure of good luck will bring about the identification of the authors of collections of drawings which are now anonymous. It is often helpful to find a jeweler's remarks upon the drawings. Giovanni Sebastiano Meyandi occasionally made notes on the back of a project revealing, for example, the kinds of stones used, the dates of beginning the work and of delivery, the name of the customer, and the name of the person who was to receive the jewel as a gift. They make it possible to recognize many unsigned drawings as belonging to his shop, and to fix the stages of the development of his style, and they point to Siena as the home of this jeweler with the un-Italian name. The dates range from 1762 to 1794. A large number of drawings by "the Neapolitan" have numbers and price indications in an identical handwriting. They are of a somewhat later period than the collection of Meyandi. Inscriptions upon some drawings prove that people living in Florence were customers of the workshop of "A.M." and "N.M.", and a few hint at "A.M." as court jeweler. Because of the somewhat confused conditions in Italian accounting before the unification of Italy in 1870, notes regarding prices do not help very much to locate a workshop. Nevertheless, the simultaneous use of piasters and scudi points to Naples and Sicily, and that of zecchini, lire, and other denominations points to Tuscany. Sometimes later owners wrote numbers upon drawings or sheets of drawings, one of them using a framing line; but this offers no help in the identification of the workshops.



GIOVANNI SEBASTIANO MEYANDI. COLORED PROJECT FOR A NECKLACE WITH A MATCHING EARRING. ABOUT 1755. 1938-88-6235

SOCIAL BACKGROUND

Most of these drawings refer to jewelry within the reach of only the wealthy classes, many of only the very rich. Neither the prices nor the designs show any regard for the means or the taste of the common people, whose demands required other sources of supply than those represented in the collection. In the eighteenth century the wealthiest city in Europe was Naples.

With a very few exceptions, these jewels were intended for the use of the laity, although the sphere of the Church is not altogether lacking. A precious pendant suggests a prelate as its wearer, while an enamelled Maltese Cross with the Instruments of the Passion apparently was intended for a member of a Maltese community.

Little is known about the social background of the craft itself. The period under consideration began with guilds and corporations still in existence, but these shortly were attacked as preventing free enterprise and protecting the producer without considering the needs of the public. However, the religious purposes of Italian corporations, which always played an important part in guild activities, survived.

Probably the most important consequence of the dissolution of the corporations as economic units for such a craft as jewelry was that professional education could no longer be confined exclusively to the workshops. It appears to be more than a coincidence that the teaching of decorative art in schools began at the time of the disappearance of the guilds.

Jewelry becomes a very specialized craft whenever gems are the most important parts of the jewels. Only a man familiar with the problems of technique is able to be the designer. On the other hand, if the jewel is a product of sculpture though in a small size and a specific material, the design can be made by any artist capable of invention.

Most of the drawings exhibited are quite certainly the work of professional jewelers. There is evidence, however, that at least two of the groups were drawn by painters who practiced as decorative designers and very probably were unable to execute a piece of jewelry with their own hands. One of these groups is drawn either by Felice Giani (1757?-1823) or, less probably, by one of his pupils. Giani was a famous decorative painter and designer of decorative art who founded in Faenza in 1793 a public drawing school. The jewelry drawings may be connected with the work of the school. The drawings of the second group are very similar in style to that of Giani, and possibly were made by another teacher in the school.

By transferring the general artistic education of youths from the workshops to the schools, and by divorcing it from the technical education of the workshops, there arose the danger of losing the artistic tradition accumulated in the craft. The more general artistic viewpoint of the schools tended to prevail.

The period under consideration saw among other changes the transition from production without copyright to the economic benefits and the potential qualitative setbacks of copyright. It is well to remember that the decorative arts up into the nineteenth century placed no restraint upon the use of another man's ideas. The enormous production of engraved models beginning with the fifteenth and ending with the early nineteenth century was based upon a principle expressed in a motto of the second half of the sixteenth century: "Nobody asks where your art comes from provided that you have it." The engravings could enjoy a limited protection, but not the ideas which they embodied. The difference in procedure between the two stages is this: before copyright existed, less inventive workers followed the lead of those who really were masters, and took every possible advantage of their work; under copyright, however, they had to conceal as much as possible the fact that they were copying. The result was that by putting so much of their own individuality into the work they lowered the quality of the examples which they were using.

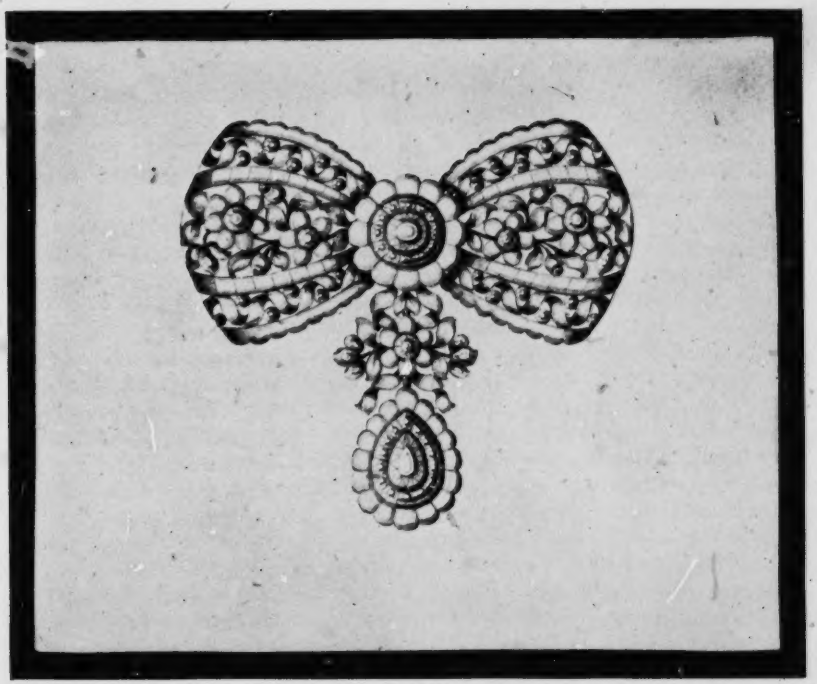
THE OBJECTS REPRESENTED

Most of the drawings represent jewelry for the use of women. It would be as wrong to draw the conclusion that men of the eighteenth century wore little jewelry as it would be to conclude from the very few rings or watch chains that are to be found that women seldom wore these. In both cases the opposite is true, as even the slightest acquaintance with the customs of the period would indicate. It is well to remember that men of fashion also wore

sprays of flowers in jewelry upon their chests and even wore earrings until about 1820; so the same design occasionally could have served both sexes.

Among men, the most highly esteemed jewels were badges of the orders of chivalry. Of those represented, two deserve special mention. One is the Order of the Iron Crown, founded by Napoleon in 1805 after his coronation as King of Italy, at which ceremony the iron crown of the Lombard kings was used. The order was renewed after 1816 by the Austrian Emperor Francis I. The other is the Ordine del Moreto, founded by Pope Pius VII, (1800-1823), which was given only to presidents of the Roman Academy of Arts of Saint Luke.

Nosegays, as brooches or pins, were worn upon the body, in the hair, or upon the hat. They constituted, together with rings, the most abundant kind of jewelry used by women of the first half of the eighteenth century. For this reason they enjoyed a greater prominence among jewelers than necklaces, earrings, corsages, and all other kinds of brooches. Soon after the



PROJECT FOR A BROOCH BY THE ITALIAN JEWELER REFERRED TO AS "THE NEAPOLITAN."
1770-1790. 1938-88-799

middle of the century the bracelet came into a new favor, and the change of style put a new emphasis upon the earring. The fashionable notion of wearing a portrait of a beloved or revered person as part of a jewel is represented by a few drawings. The bow-knot, already favored in the seventeenth century as a brooch, regained its popularity in the second half of the eighteenth century. It was worn at times upon the sleeve, as was jewelry in the sixteenth century. It also formed the central portion of a necklace. With the beginning of the nineteenth century a new emphasis was put upon jewelry as headgear, first in the form of diadems, of which as many as three were sometimes worn at one time. The diadems were soon joined by combs with richly decorated cresting. In the second and third quarters of the nineteenth century, fillets were highly fashionable. The ferronière or frontlet worn upon a golden chain across the forehead gained a degree of popularity from about 1810 to 1840 after having been in disuse for nearly three centuries.

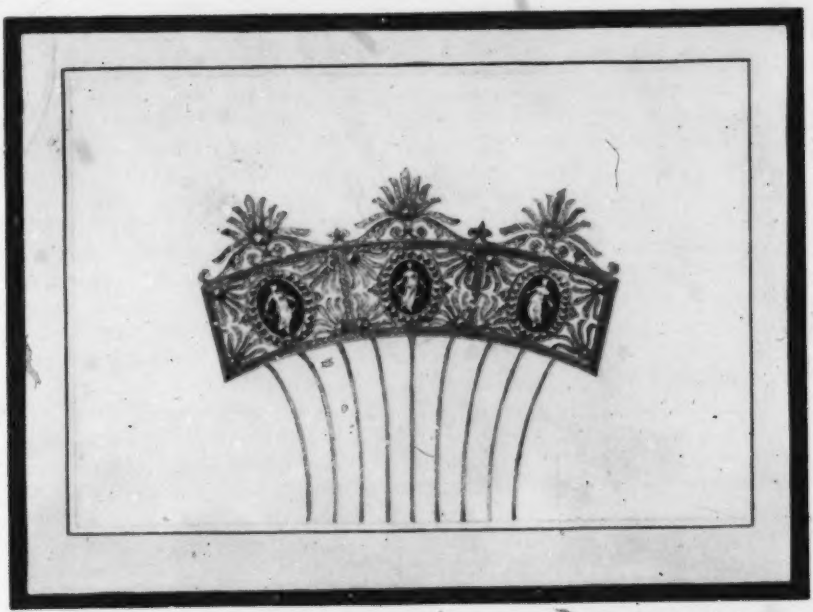
MATERIALS AND METHODS

The appearance of a jewel is determined by the quality of the material of which it is made as well as by the design. Among the drawings exhibited it may be assumed that those up to about 1810 refer to objects that were intended to be made in a workshop, while some of the later period were possibly meant for an extended and industrialized form of production which corresponds to the factory method. This may be especially true of designs intended to be executed in stamped gold by a process of mass production which permitted the use of an extremely thin leaf of gold and gave shape and decoration by means of a machine rather than by tools in the hands of a workman.

Most of the earlier drawings refer to objects in which emphasis is laid upon the gems or in a lesser degree upon the harmony of gems and the mounts or frames of gold or silver. The importance of the metallic components increases greatly while that of the gems diminishes with the advent of the nineteenth century. This was connected with the general impoverishment following the revolutions and the Napoleonic wars, and with the increasing importance of the middle classes with their modest fortunes. The art of the chiseler acquired a new appreciation in the early nineteenth century. Small metallic sculpture was enjoyed as it had not been since the periods of the Renaissance and the early baroque.

It may be assumed that in the whole period considered the jewelers bought their gems already cut. The period included two events of the highest importance for bringing gems into the market: the melting down of jewels in France in 1759 and the financial distress of the former ruling classes during the revolutionary period at the close of the eighteenth century.

The drawings which indicate the colors of the gems refer in the eighteenth century to white, green, and red stones, to which are added in the nineteenth



COLORED PROJECT FOR A COMB. ITALY, ABOUT 1810. 1938-88-967

century blue, yellow, and amethyst. It may be assumed that the drawings of the eighteenth century generally took only costly stones into consideration, and that the nineteenth century produced another of its changes in this regard, for at that time much use evidently was made of large gems of small value and of the so-called Roman pearl, a substitute made of powdered mother-of-pearl upon a core of alabaster. There is no indication of any use made of the false diamonds invented by and named after Georges-Frédéric Strass, (1700-1770). "The Neapolitan's" drawings include some of jewels with colored woven ribbons forming an integral part, in accordance with the fashion of the late eighteenth century. Cameos make their first appearance in the drawings of the early nineteenth century. Enamel was intended for several objects of the eighteenth century, especially pendants. Beginning with 1825 it gained a new importance, being used for jewelry of high artistic value as well as for jewels in the stamped technique. A novelty of the time was the use of black enamel. Among metals, gold and silver were taken into consideration, and a small use was made of ornaments of cut steel, so favored in English jewelry since the end of the eighteenth century and in continental jewelry during the early nineteenth century. Genuine pearls gained an ever-increasing importance following 1850.

STYLISTIC CONSIDERATIONS

The drawings indicate that from about 1750 the jewelers of Paris set the style of the design generally applied by the Italian jewelers. Too much jewelry was imported direct from France for the Italian jewelers not to have realized that they had to follow the example if they intended to compete.

The design of the late seventeenth century had proved itself very adaptable, and the period 1725-1750 saw further attempts to transform it. Asymmetry became symmetry, the blade curve and the blade-volute lost their shape gradually to become rocaille, and the pedestal-shaped support was included.

French jewelry of the styles of Louis XV and XVI dominated the design soon after 1750, especially with respect to necklaces and earrings. The result was that design as a whole received more subtlety, articulation, variety, and eccentricity, as exemplified by the combination of an extreme naturalism with traditional objectivity in a single object, indicated by so many of the drawings of earrings perpetuating a type invented in the seventeenth century. The transformation from the broad type of earrings with three drops into an elongated type consisting of only two or three parts; the use of architectural motifs for the design; or the reduction of the design to primitive motifs of grouping the stones; all are in line with French developments up to 1795.

The style of "the Neapolitan's" workshop transformed itself without an interlude to satisfy the exigencies of the taste of about 1820 to 1830, keeping a generally classicistic character without making sudden changes.

Elsewhere the usual interlude known as Empire style occurs. The bracelet 1938-88-969 offers a parallel to the jewels worn by Paola Borghese Bonaparte in a portrait by Robert Lefèvre dated 1806. In it can be seen a strikingly rich realization of the usually dominant principles of the Empire style. These include the preference for shining and contrasting unbroken surfaces. Emphasis was placed upon the harmony of the colored gems and the metalwork. The latter gained in importance, and often took the shape of a band.

There is another more purely Italian variety of this style. It is characterized chiefly by the use of the curve and even more by the volute in the shape of a circular pediment with a shell inside. This was a motif as foreign to the tradition of jewelry as it was firmly established in the general ornamentation of the eighteenth century. At this point the influence of an artist not bound by the traditions of jewelry becomes especially evident. Perhaps it can be attributed to Giani.

When the Napoleonic period closed in 1815, its predecessors acquired a new importance. The very restricted decorative quality of the Empire style allowed it only a short period of survival in jewelry. But the favor which the motif of ears of grain enjoyed during some years may be attributed to it, and the motif of the volute retained a very important place for many years. The most important inheritance from the Empire style was the framing of one,

or the connecting of a few, principal units by filigree or other linear elements, a practice which had developed in jewelry employing cameos but not gems.

Traditions had been discontinued nearly everywhere, and a new beginning was imperative. The first phase was a mixture of the styles of the Empire and the latest Louis XVI, with designs less clear and uniform, more complicated and diversified, and with a growing emphasis upon naturalistic forms. But it was no longer possible for one style alone to dominate. Several fashions ran concurrently or followed each other in rapidly changing sequence. Predilections of individuals could be the determining factor. Romanticism blossomed. Medievalism, orientalism, and the later New Greek style find only slight expression among the drawings. But the drawings show that parallel to the development in other countries there occurred a revival of the style of the second half of the eighteenth century, which was favored especially during the second quarter of the nineteenth century.

More important for the future, however, and more in line with the general artistic tendencies of the period, was a style that was thought of as continuing the Renaissance. It was already widely current soon after 1840. In reality the style frequently has a greater affinity to the baroque than to the Renaissance. In jewelry it seems to have begun with jewels in the shape of escutcheons which proved adaptable to the stamped process. They appear at first as not altogether in contradiction to the Empire style. Characteristic of most of the jewels in the New Renaissance style is their general shape of either an escutcheon or a tablet reposing upon a console, both attached to a wall. The tablet points to a connection with the console motif which was much favored in the system of ornamentation of the style of Louis XVI. A feeling which corresponds to this style in a general way is strikingly evident in many drawings in the main section of this group.

It is not known which center had the precedence in taking up this New Renaissance style in jewelry. Certain suggestions point to France, but the question has not yet really been investigated. This group of drawings offers other problems. Most of its divisions are interrelated through certain similarities, not enough to allow their attribution to one designer but enough to point to an interrelationship. This raises the question of whether we do not have evidence here of the influence of school training in the arts of design. Most of these drawings give the impression of being older than they are, and much handled. It may be asked whether the original designer or a later owner attempted to give them an antique appearance. It seems more likely, however, that we are dealing with a style of drawings for decorative art inspired by one artist or one artistic school. Probably the early specimens looked like the escutcheons and other projects of this kind in a romantic Louis XVI style, which were certainly executed in the beginning of the nineteenth century. This may have given rise to the sketchy and somewhat indefinite appearance of the drawings. At least one of them bears the price of the object if it were to be executed.

The nineteenth century was a period of artistic naturalism, which was expressed in jewelry in a degree far surpassing that of former styles. The drawings of the workshop of "A.M." and "N.M." show the use made of the naturalism of the early Renaissance after the transitional phase had passed. But "N.M." at his latest goes beyond this and follows contemporary French naturalism. The extreme phases make use of fantastic forms of a not unnatural appearance, or of close imitations of plants and animals. Especially favored was the employment of the serpent. An extreme in naturalism was reached in the designs making use of the motif of the Milky Way. This was an invention of Eugène Julienne in Paris, who was one of the influential designers for decorative art in his time (1808-1875).

Classical jewelry occasionally had been copied since the beginning of the century in Naples. But the real revival of classical jewelry is connected with Pio Fortunato Castellani (1793-1865), and his sons. Alessandro Castellani defined the aims of their efforts in a pamphlet, *Antique Jewelry and its Revival*, printed privately in London in 1862 and in Philadelphia by the Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Art. "The new school of jewelry established by us at Rome aims at the perfect imitation of ancient and medieval works of art in gold and precious stones; each object being so executed as to show by its style to what epoch and nation it belongs." He told of making copies of Renaissance jewels after having reached this goal. This phase of jewelry design is represented among the drawings by those of Salvatori, with dates ranging from 1855 to 1872. But Salvatori did not succeed in producing designs able to compete with those of the periods he intended to revive. Too much of the contemporary nineteenth century has infiltrated into his drawings, and they belong in reality to the Etruscan and the New Renaissance styles, as the latter is represented in drawings of Rodolfo Tanagli Pagani.

Nothing is known about the existence of any of the pieces of jewelry for which the drawings were made. In any case, such a collection of drawings as is exhibited is likely to display the general scope of the development much more broadly than might be possible with actual jewels.

RUDOLF BERLINER

The writer wishes to acknowledge the assistance received from members of the Museum staff, especially Mr. Carl C. Dauterman.